



How to Start a Successful Freelance Career

A Newsletter by Inkwell Editorial
September 12, 2007



SECTION I: Interview with White Paper Writer, Gordon Graham

PUBLISHER'S NOTE: I wanted to interview Gordon because this is a type of writing I've never "officially" done. Officially is in quotation marks because although, I've done some things that could be called case studies and/or white papers, they weren't termed that by me or the client.

This is one of the most lucrative fields of freelance writing. Preliminary research revealed that on the low end, case studies pay \$2,500-\$5,000. And, they are usually only a few pages long. But, clients pay for the end value – an increase in sales.

White papers are usually commissioned by mid- to large-sized companies. Although more and more, smaller, forward-thinking companies are realizing their value as well.

If you've ever wanted to know about this type of writing, and/or want to enter the freelance writing field on the high end, then this issue is for you

Enjoy!

Yuwanda Black, Publisher

<http://www.InkwellEditorial.com>

<http://www.InkwellEditorial.blogspot.com>

P.S.: A mountain gratitude to Gordon, who thought his answers were too long. What they are is extremely informative. Thanks for your thoroughness Gordon.

INTERVIEW WITH GORDON GRAHAM, AKA, "THAT WHITE PAPER GUY"

QUESTIONS



1. From your site, <http://www.thatwhitepaperguy.com>, I learned that your previous "day job" was as a VP Marketing executive for a wireless hardware/software vendor. Have you always worked in marketing, or did you hold other "day jobs" before becoming a freelance writer?

Well, I've always worked in writing and publishing. I started as a student journalist; at college I spent way more time on the student papers than I did in class!

In the 1980s I worked as a non-fiction book editor, and discovered that I can understand technical things fairly easily. So I became a full-time technical writer doing software manuals for a few years, and then went freelance in 1987. That was 20 years ago this year. Since then I've written hundreds of articles for business magazines in Canada, and gradually started doing corporate writing because it pays much better.

Most technology companies have a difficult time explaining what they do. I drifted into marketing writing because I seem to be able to talk to a software developer or executive, and put what they're doing into words that more people can relate to. In 1997, I went back to work full-

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time for this excellent little company in Montreal and we had the good fortune to grow the company very quickly and sell it off for millions of dollars. That was a tremendous experience, but now that I'm freelancing again, it would take an awful lot to get me back to a full-time job.

2. Many don't know what "white papers" are? Can you explain exactly what they are and why you think they are so effective?

The term is used very loosely. I've heard white papers defined as everything from "a bait-piece" to "a way to freeze-dry your ideas." After more than five years of research, I think of a white paper as a "persuasive essay."

A white paper is something between an academic paper and a magazine article in Scientific American, something between a technical manual and a glossy brochure. A white paper is sponsored, usually by one vendor or association, and generally to promote one product, service, or method for solving some problem.

Others will say that a white paper is basically any type of document or special report given away to attract prospects. Maybe that's not wrong, but it's a much looser definition than I tend to use.

White papers can be effective because everyone has more to do and more to learn and more to read than they can possibly get to. A really good white paper can help a business person save time by clarifying some business problem or issue for them, by teaching them something about the subject. So the reader learns something that will help them on the job, and the business associates itself with an ideal solution to a problem.

3. If one had no experience as a white paper writer, how would you suggest they get started? What skills should they learn?

INTERVIEW CONTINUED BELOW

Want to make \$100-\$200/day as a freelance writer? Our freelance writing seminar, coming in October, will feature employers who tell you exactly what they're looking for in freelancers -- and more! Details at <http://inkwelleditorial.blogspot.com/2007/05/want-face-time-wemployers-who-hire.html>.

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You will need to know how to interview, do online research, and pull together a mass of information into a smooth argument. You may have to manage a confusing process with many people involved. You may have to develop graphics that communicate at a glance the point of a

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6-to-8 page document.

You will need to write in a way that's easy to read but very informative. White papers have their own style. White papers are based on facts, but they are not like journalism, because they are not built around quotes and a who-what-where-why-when format.

And white papers are not like advertising or direct-mail copywriting, because they are not designed to push certain emotional buttons (greed, fear, pride) in readers to compel them to take action.

They DO take a certain point of view and promote that, using facts, logic, and persuasion, but in a more balanced mix than any other type of marketing document.

So the writing style must be very deliberate and sober. For example, I can't remember ever using an exclamation mark in any white paper. I tell people they should think like a lawyer to build an open-and-shut case based on impeccable arguments, and then write like a journalist to convey those arguments in short, crisp words so everyone catches it.

Wherever you can learn these kind of skills, they will serve you well in writing white papers.

4. As you have an extensive marketing background, acquiring clients probably comes easier to you than others. What marketing methods would you suggest newbies use to get clients?

Well, I think the main thing anyone has to overcome in selling any creative service is the client's fear that you will screw up and not deliver anything and make them look bad for hiring you. There is an expression around newspaper offices, "The paper can't print excuses!" and it's so harsh but so true. You have to be able to deliver.

Remember, not all corporate clients have worked with writers before, they are not like editors at magazines or book publishers who work with writers every day.

So you absolutely need a web site, and your web site has to communicate that you are reliable, knowledgeable, personable, reasonable, and helpful. And your web site needs to be well-listed in Google, so people can find it. This is how you will get most of your business.

For instance, try "white paper writer" in Google. Right now my site is #2 in Google. That's not an accident. I have a firm in New York City working on my web site every week to make sure it shows up well.

Then you should approach potential clients directly. You can do this with e-mail, direct mail, cold calls on the phone, networking, references, in lineups at the grocery store, anything to get

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into a conversation with a potential client. I recommend working through the type of business or vertical market that you understand best. Have you written a couple articles for a certain trade magazine? Then use those articles to establish that you know the basic lingo of that particular business, and approach the major players in that industry to write white papers for them.

5. For your site, SoftwareCEO.com, you routinely interview CEOs to uncover the secrets of their success. Do you approach CEOs differently than you would other potential interviewees? If so, how? If not, why not?

Yes, I have been interviewing CEOs of software firms for three years now. SoftwareCEO, the site I edit, is the largest online community of software executives in the world, with more than 250,000 visitors a month.

In some ways I can be more blunt with a CEO, because they don't need permission to answer. I ask for a lot of numbers, you know: sales, average deal size, sales cycle, headcounts, growth, all the stuff other CEOs are curious about. Maybe the higher you go in the corporate ladder, the more direct you can be with your questions.

But the point of any interview is to get the subject talking and saying interesting things that illuminate the subject in nice pithy ways. and whatever it takes to do that is fine. You have to put your subject at ease so they will talk to you. It's a specialized form of human relations really. Why should they trust this voice on the phone? So you have to get them to trust you, and then not abuse that trust when you write.

6. Besides white papers, do you do other types of freelance writing – eg, business articles, features for tech magazines, etc.?

I do service journalism (how to) and features for SoftwareCEO, and I very occasionally write for magazines. I would like to do more of that, but I honestly don't have time. And when I compare what I can make from doing a white paper or case study, it is way less work for way more money, so the choice is obvious.

7. Why did you decide to become a freelance writer?

I wanted to be a writer ever since Grade 3. The teacher used to put these pictures around the walls of the classroom, animals and people and places, and she said if you finish your work, pick out a picture and write a story about it.

I would rush through my school work to write another story. The teacher would read them out in class, and the other kids would go "ooohhh" and "aaaaahhhhh" and laugh. I thought, wow this is the best! and decided to be a writer right then.

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I tried all different ways to make a living as a writer: doing newspapers, magazines, books, technical manuals, press kits, brochures, web sites, and finally case studies and white papers. I have been lucky to always have more work than I could handle.

8. How long did it take you to establish yourself as a freelance writer (eg, I no longer fear having to go back to a 9-5)?

I remember the first few weeks after I went freelance, I couldn't believe the freedom. I had this feeling someone was going to ring my doorbell and say, "You're coming with us! You have to get back to work now!" But they never did.

I was always busy, and over the years I've raised my fees and learned what sorts of clients I work best with. The timeframe is probably different for everyone.

When you keep getting clients offering to hire you to work full-time, and you're too busy to say yes, that helps build your confidence. For me, that happened pretty quickly, in the first year or two. When I went back full-time that was my choice. And there's no shame in moving back and forth, as long as it's your choice and you enjoy the experience.

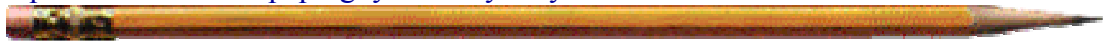
9. What is the number one piece of advice you'd give to those who are thinking about making the leap to freelance writing as a career choice?

Gee, it's hard to limit it to just one thing. Specialize. Don't waste time. Make sure you can write fast and fluidly. Don't be afraid to market yourself. Don't get distracted by friends and family who treat you like you're not really working. Enjoy what you do. Take time off to de-stress. Do something physical besides sitting at the computer.

Most of all I would have to say, believe in yourself and don't let anyone say you can't do it. There are tons of businesses out there in every field who need to communicate what they are doing. If you can do that, they will pay you.

GORDON GRAHAM: BIO

To read Mr. Graham's complete bio, click here:
<http://www.thatwhitepaperguy.com/mystory.html>



SECTION II: FREELANCE JOBS

Ka'ching!

NOTE: There are no new freelance jobs this issue. Usually, someone forwards me some to pass on, but coming off the summer months, I'm not surprised that there isn't much out there.

Now that "the editorial season" is here, there should be quite a few in the next issue. The following are from the last issue, so if you're a new subscriber and/or haven't already applied, here's your chance to do so.

Freelance Writer for Photography Newsletter

Are you a superb writer, editor & DIYer who loves photography?

You'll be involved in all aspects of the creation of the Photojojo newsletter: finding awesome photo stuff, writing and editing, finding and working with contributors, taking and editing photos, writing simple HTML, and publishing emails.

This is a freelance, part-time position.

We want a creative writer who loves loves loves photography and isn't afraid to get some glue on his/her hands. Someone who can write friendly, fun, and efficient prose that makes people smile.

To read the rest of the job description and to apply, go here:

http://photojojo.com/help_wanted.html.

Freelance Writers Wanted for Technology Magazine

Make is a do-it-yourself technology magazine written by makers. When you write something for *Make*, use your voice. Tell us the story behind your project.

There are four types of content in *Make*: Projects, Features, Reviews, and Everything Else. (If you have an idea for something that doesn't fit in one of the first three areas but is still related to do-it-yourself technology, we'd like to hear about it, too – hence the Everything Else category.)

We pay \$25 to \$100 for a review. Payment for other types of content will be negotiated.

For full details on how to submit to *Make*, click here:

<http://admin.makezine.com/submissions.csp>



SECTION III: My Freelance Writing Life (aka Yuwanda's Corner)



Here, I post ramblings about my freelance life and my personal life (a little). My hope is that it will shed some light on what goes on in the life of a freelancer.

Ahh, September. I have a love/hate relationship with this month because it signals the beginning of the editorial season – eg, when projects start to really roll in.

BUT, it also means you have to do the work you bring in. I'm exhausted! Between promoting the seminar, trying to meet deadlines and stay on track with marketing for new clients – I'm busier than ever.

This is my first seminar and on the face of it, it seems pretty easy to put one together. But, the logistics of it will drive you bonkers. Meeting with hotel sales reps, writing PowerPoint presentations, coordinating speakers, pulling together seminar material – it's a full-time job for one person.

Every time I look at my bank account I'm like, "I should be making more money." But, that's the downside of being an entrepreneur. And, that's the lesson for this issue. In simple terms: entrepreneurship is delayed gratification.

I know all the work will be worth it once the day of the seminar arrives, but right now, I just want to hire someone and say, "Handle this!"

Anyway, that's my professional rant for this issue.

On a personal note, I'm looking forward to the upcoming marathon in November. I did my first full one last year. This year I'm doing the half-marathon, for two reasons: i) I haven't trained worth squat (but can gut out 13 miles); and ii) I want the medal.

I trained for 11 months for last year's marathon. It paid off big time. I finished in 4 hours and 36 minutes. All finishers under 5 hours got medals. So, this year, I want to do the half-marathon to get that medal to add to the one I got last year.

I now understand why Olympians compete for medals. It's a symbol of all you work so long and hard for. Every time I look at it, it reminds me of what I am capable of if I just put my mind to it.

My fiancé said to me, "If the house was burning down, you'd look for that medal instead of me!" Not true, of course (I would look for the medal though, after I made sure he was safe). ☺

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Doggy Notes: I've stopped walking Blacky, our dog. I just can't handle her anymore. She's too big – and is way too playful for my taste.

She look sat me with eyes that say, “Shame on you, you unfriendly person. I tried to be your friend, why don't you like to play with me?”

I feel guilty but, in my defense, when I was growing up, we had a mutt of a dog (Trixie) who used to do her own thing. We didn't walk her – I grew up in the country and she was free to roam – and she pretty much left us alone. Practically the only time she “bothered” any human was when she wanted to be fed.

So, I guess I just don't have doggy parenting skills. At any rate, my fiancé is a big kid who loves to play with her. As long as he's paw-free when he enters the house, I'm cool with the both of them.

Want to read previous issues? See info below.



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SECTION IV: PREVIOUS ISSUES

Issue 1: June 6, 2007 can be found at <http://www.inkwelleditorial.com/newsletter.pdf>

Issue 2: June 20, 2007 can be found at <http://www.inkwelleditorial.com/Newsletter/6-20-07.pdf>

Issue 3: July 18, 2007 can be found at <http://www.inkwelleditorial.com/Newsletter/7-18-07-freelance-writing-newsletter.pdf>

Issue 4: August 15, 2007 can be found at <http://www.inkwelleditorial.com/Newsletter/8-15-07-freelance-writing-newsletter.pdf>

Always editorially yours,
Yuwanda

P.S.: In the Next Issue: Want to know what it's like to freelance as a cartoonist/illustrator? In the next issue, you'll hear it straight from the source – Dan Rosandich.

P.P.S.: Don't forget, as a subscriber you get special deals on our e-books and seminars via a secret page on InkwellEditorial.com. **Ebooks for \$2.99 – regularly \$9.95!** It's my gift for being a subscriber. The secret page is at <http://www.InkwellEditorial.com/bizguides-sub.htm>.

P.P.P.S.: Want to make \$100-\$200/day writing from home? Details in Inkwell's upcoming Freelance Writing Seminar at <http://inkwelleditorial.blogspot.com/2007/05/want-face-time-wemployers-who-hire.html>

Your Ideas Count! Send in your comments/questions/suggestions, etc. Have a freelancing issue you'd like to see covered? Email me at info@inkwelleditorial.com. I'll do my best to cover it.

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